DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 379 EC 301 106

AUTHOR Cobb, Hazel B.; Horn, Charles J., Jr.
TITLE Implementation of Professional Standards in Special Education: A National Study.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agency Role; *Codes of Ethics; *Disabilities; Educational Practices; *Educational Principles; Elementary Secondary Education; Information Dissemination; *Professional Associations; Professional Development; Professional Personnel; Special Education; *Special Education Teachers; *Standards; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS *Council for Exceptional Children

ABSTRACT

A sample of 1,000 members of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) was surveyed concerning their use of the CEC Standards for Professional Practice. Responses received from 381 members found that 51 had a copy of the standards and had used it, while 330 did not have a copy and had not used the standards. The "yes" respondents indicated that each of the 64 standards was used by at least one respondent. Three standards were used by more than 50% of the "yes" respondents: using appropriate methods and curricula, maintaining class size and case load, and keeping efficient and objective records. Highest frequency reasons for not using the standards were not knowing of their existence, and not knowing enough about professional ethics because it was not included in teacher preparation programs. The paper calls for the CEC to take leadership actions to disseminate knowledge about the standards. (JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

EC

ED344379

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

A NATIONAL STUDY

Hazel B. Cobb

Charles J. Horn, Jr.

November, 1989

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Hazel B. Cobb
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EC 301106

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Author Information

Hazel B. Cobb, Ed.D.
Professor
The University of Alabama
Area of Special Education
Box 870231
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0231
(205) 348-7340

Charles J. Horn, Jr., Ed.D.
Professor
The University of Alabama
Area of Special Education
Box 870231
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0231
(205) 348-7340

ref a:\implemen.921(horn#3)

Abstract

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Standards of Professional Practice were published in April of 1983. The present study was conducted to investigate the extent to which these standards have been implemented by current members of the CEC. The major findings of the study indicate that 87% of the respondents neither have nor do not use the standards. Most of them are not familiar with the existence of the standards. For the other 13% of the respondents, the standards are used. The results of the study suggest that there is a need for CEC to take leadership actions to widely disseminate knowledge about the standards.

Implementation of Professional Standards In Special Education: A National Study*

Introduction

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) adopted a code of ethics and standards of practice in April of 1983. The standards were developed by the CEC Professional Standards Committee (Heller, 1983). They were distributed to all active members of the Council for Exceptional Children in November, 1983. Practicing special educators were expected to begin implementing the new standards at that time. No enforcement procedures were established by the Council for Exceptional Children to assure compliance with the standards. The standards were developed through a lengthy process that involved extensive involvement of CEC members. There is a need at this time to ascertain if the extensive involvement of members has led to compliance with the standards..

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) recognized the need for professional standards from its inception. This need was given a high priority at the

*Presentation made at, The Twelfth Annual TED Conference, Memphis, TN, November, 1989

first annual meeting in 1923 and continues today to be a part of the Council's mission statement (Heller & Ridenhour, 1983). This mission was reflected by the "Professionals Standards for Personnel in Education of Exceptional Children" report adopted by the CEC Delegate Assembly in 1966. That report was not replaced until 1976 with the report "Guidelines for Personnel in the Education of Exceptional Children." The Professional Standards Committee was appointed at that time for the purpose of continuous reviews of professional standards (Heller & Ridenhour, 1983).

Three significant developments have influenced the adoption of special education standards since 1976. First, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) implemented a new standard (2.1.2 Special Education) which requires the training institution to provide students with skills and knowledge sufficient to provide appropriate education for exceptional students (NCATE, 1982). Second, the Virginia CEC Federation recommended in 1981 that CEC should develop a code of ethics and standards of practice. The acceptance of this resolution expanded the original mission of the Professional Standards Committee. Third, the CEC Board of Governors approved

in 1982 the Professional Standards Committee's Action Plan for 1982-83. A process was set forth to ensure that the standards represented the concerns and needs of the membership. The resulting standards were compared to those established by other organizations which represented specific special education professionals (Heller, 1982). The standards were significant because they created the potential for adherence to and enforcement of the ethnics code for the first time (Heller & Ridenhour, 1983).

A code of ethics and some standards of practice provide the means by which a profession can influence many events. Realizing the impact of these significant documents, the Professional Standards Committee developed and published The Code of Ethics and the Standards for Professional Practice. Special educators have in the document a set of standards which can be used to chart future direction for the profession. Six years after the code and the standards were published it is useful to know if special education professionals are adhering to them. Heller (1983) cautioned that a trademark of any quality profession is its willingness to establish and abide by a code of ethics and standards in professional activities. He further

emphasized that special educators have now established both a code of ethics and standards. Heller clearly stated, "adherence to their principles remains to be realized" (p. 199).

Not many special educators have addressed ethics as an important issue, the few who have addressed it (Heller, 1983, Turnbull and Barber, 1984) view it as very significant. Some special educators (Bateman, 1982, Dobson and Dobson, 1983) see that the need for widely disseminated knowledge of ethics is inherent in the everyday situations which impinge on them. Bateman (1982) emphasized the daily dilemmas of situations in conflict between professional responsibility and school policy, and conflicts between legal and professional concerns. She reminded special educators that the standards were designed to guide professional behavior and decision making.

Dobson and Dobson (1983) noted the importance of congruency between teacher beliefs and practice. They asserted that some educators choose not to assume responsibility for their actions. Maple (1983) noted that the issue of professional ethics is seldom included in discussions of teacher preparation. She viewed the process of adopting ethical standards as

providing a catalyst to address the issue of excellence in teaching and implementing needed changes.

Turnbull and Barber (1984) maintained that issues of the professional ethical dimension, more than ever, command immediate attention. They supported their position by noting cases in which the courts deferred to professional judgments when making judicial decisions about the rights of the handicapped.

A study (Cobb & Horn, 1989) conducted at The University of Alabama in 1987 was designed to investigate the status of the CEC Standards of Practice at that time. The research question posed was: Have special educators made the Standards part of their daily practice? The study was confined to 744 selected special education teachers, administrators, and teacher educators in the state of Alabama. These special educators were chosen as subjects for the study because they were active enough in their profession to attend a professional conference. It was assumed they would be active in other professional areas, such as ethics and standards, as well. The special educators were sent a questionnaire asking them to respond to questions about their use of the standards of practice.

The findings revealed that a majority (87.8%) of

the respondents did not have copies of the standards of their profession. They consequently did not use them for guidance in meeting their professional responsibilities. Those who do use the standards, find occasion to use each of the 67 standards at some time.

Method

This study was conducted in the Spring of 1989 in an effort to determine if the sample of special education teachers in Alabama were representative of CEC members in general. A computer selected random sample of 1,000 current members of the Council for Exceptional Children was drawn. Each subject received a two-part mailed questionnaire. Participants were asked to indicate "yes" or "no" if they had a copy of the CEC Standards for Professional Practice readily available to them, and if they had intentionally referred to them since 1983 for guidance in meeting their professional responsibilities.

If the responses to both questions were "yes", participants were asked to complete Part One of the Questionnaire. Part One listed each of the 64 specific standards and participants were asked "yes" or "no" if they had referred to that Standard for guidance in meeting their professional responsibilities.

If the responses to both questions were "no", participants were asked to complete Part Two of the questionnaire. Part Two listed eight possible reasons a CEC member would not have or would not use a copy of the CEC Standards of Professional Practice. The reasons included:

1. "I did not know of the existence of the CEC Standards for Professional Practice."

2. "The uses of Professional Ethics was not included in may teacher preparation program so I do not know enough about it."

3. "The responsibility to protect the rights of children belongs to the parents and the attorneys, not special educators."

4. "It is the responsibility of the State Department of Education, not special educators to be advocates for exceptional persons."

5. "As an employee, I have no input into such matters, I follow instructions."

6. "The standards are so closely parallel to my own values and ideals that I do not need to refer to them for guidance."

7. "I disagree with the Standards as published, therefore, do not feel bound by them."

8. "Other (please specify)_____."

Respondents were asked to indicate if they were teachers, teacher educators, or administrators.

Results

A total of 381 (38%) completed questionnaires were returned. Fifty-one respondents answered "yes" to the two questions about having and using the standards. Three hundred and thirty of the respondents answered "no" to both questions. The respective percentages, 13% "yes" and 87% "no" are consistent with and similar to the Alabama Study reported by Cobb and Horn (1989).

The fifty-one "yes" respondents who completed Part One of the questionnaire indicated as few as one (1) and as many as 13 use each of the 64 standards. Three standards were used by more than 50% of the respondents. The standards were: Standard 1.1.1.1 Use Appropriate Methods and Curricula (60%); Maintain Class Size, Case Load (55%); and Keep Efficient and Objective Records (55%). All of these standards related to Instructional Responsibilities. Four standards were used by less than 1% of the respondents to Part One. The standards were: Standard 2.2.6 Share Equitably in Opportunities and Benefits (.19%); Standard 2.2.8 Provide Objective Evaluation of Applicants (.19%);

Standard 2.2.9 Resolve Professional Problems by Using Established Procedures (.19%); and Standard 2.2.5 Receive Fair and Impartial Due Process When Released (.16%). The highest percentage (82%) of the teachers indicated they used Standard 1.1.1.1 Use Appropriate Methods and Curricula.

Part Two of the questionnaire listed eight possible reasons why a CEC member would not use the CEC Standards of Professional Practice. Table 1 presents the percent of respondents indicating reasons why the standards are not used.

Insert Table 1 about here

The 23% of the respondents who used the "other" category did not suggest any additional reasons. They made comments or elaborated on previous answers.

Two reasons were given by a high percentage of the respondents. "I did not know of the existence of the CEC Standards of Practice," (71%) and "the issue of Professional Ethics was not included in my teacher preparation program so I do not know enough about it" (47%).

Discussion

The major finding of this study is that special educators who are active members of the Council for Exceptional Children do not have and do not use the CEC Standards of Professional Practice. They do not do so because they do not know of the existence of the standards, or the issue of Professional Ethics was not included in their teacher education program. The subjects in this study reflect a low level of interest in the standards as indicated by the low level (38%) of participation in the study.

The Council should take action to correct this lack of knowledge of the standards. Each new CEC member should receive a copy of the standards as a part of the membership packet. The standards should be reprinted periodically in either Exceptional Children or Teaching Exceptional Children, which all members receive. Teacher educators should make every effort to include instruction on ethics and standards in teacher preparation programs.

The fact that CEC members do not use their own Standards of Practice for professional guidance is unfortunate. A Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice can be a unifying force for a profession. In

a time of change and reform in education a unified profession of special educators could exercise considerable influence for improvement in special education programs.

A secondary finding of this study is that the standards are usable. Each of the 64 standards was used by CEC members. This is an encouraging sign in that major additions or deletions to the standards are not required. If special educators were aware of the existence of the standards, they could use them for guidance in meeting professional responsibilities.

References

Bateman, B. (1982). The special educator as a professional person. Exceptional Education Quarterly, 2(4), 57-69.

Cobb, H. B., & Horn, C. J. (1989). The status of implementation of professional standards in special education: An Alabama study. Alabama Council for Exceptional Children Journal, VI(2), 4-8.

Dobson, R., & Dobson, J. (1983). Teacher beliefs-practice congruency. Viewpoints in Teaching and Learning, 59(1), 20-27.

Heller, H. W. (1983). Special education professional standards: Need, value, and use. Exceptional Children, 50, 199-204.

Heller, H., & Rodenhour, N. (1983). Professional standards. Foundation for the future. Exceptional Children, 49, 294-298.

Maple, c. C. (1983). Is special education certification a guarantee of teaching excellence? Exceptional Children, 49, 308-313.

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. (1982). Standards for the accreditation of teacher education. Washington, DC: Author.

Turnbull, R. H., & Barber, P. (1984). Perspectives on public policy. In E. L. Meyen (Ed.), Mental retardation: Topics of today-issues of tomorrow (pp. 5-14) (1, Serial No. 1). Division on Mental Retardation of the Council for Exceptional Children.

Table 1.

Reasons Standards Are Not Used.

	Number	Percent
1. I did not know ofthe existence of the CEC Standards Professional Practice.	36	71
2. The issues of Professional Ethics was not included in my teacher preparation program so I do not know enough about it.	24	47
3. The responsibility to project the rights of children belongs to the parents and the attorneys, not special educators.	1	5
4. It is the responsibility of the State Department of Education, not special education to be advocates for exceptional persons.	2	4
5. As an employee, I have no input into such matters, I follow instructions.	5	10
6. The standards are so closely parallel to my own values and ideals that I do not need to refer to them for guidance.	10	20
7. I disagree with the Standards as published, therefore, do not feel bound by them.	1	5
8. Other (please specify)_____	12	23

N = 51